

VZCZCXRO5025
RR RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHCH #0746/01 1931429
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 111429Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY CHISINAU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6890
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CHISINAU 000746

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/10/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [OSCE](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MD](#)
SUBJECT: TRANSNISTRIAN POWER STRUGGLES OVER
SUCCESSION

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Rudolf V. Perina
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Two succession-related power struggles are currently taking place in Transnistria. The first is the struggle to determine who will succeed Valeri Litskai as Transnistrian "Minister" for Foreign Affairs. Political insiders who attended the Embassy's 4th of July reception categorically ruled out the idea that First Deputy Minister Vladimir Yastrebchak, who on July 1st was named Acting Foreign Minister, would keep this position permanently. Instead, they suggested three key contenders for the job, each backed by a different power center.

2. (C) Simultaneously, a draft law now being considered by the Supreme Soviet would remove the Vice President from the Presidential succession process in the event that a "President" (i.e. Smirnov) were to voluntarily resign, or if he were to become incapacitated or be unable to fulfill responsibilities for other reasons. The current draft reportedly offers two different mechanisms -- in the case of resignation, control would pass to the Parliamentary Speaker, whereas in the case of incapacitation, to the Supreme Court Chairman. End Summary.

Three Power Centers Each Have Their Own Candidate
for FM

3. (C) On July 1st, Valeri Litskai was formally removed as Transnistrian Foreign Minister. Rumors had circulated for weeks about both illness and drinking binges. Litskai attended our Fourth of July reception with a swollen broken arm, looking pale and clearly having lost a lot of weight. A Transnistrian who works in Smirnov's staff told us that the "president" had long been irked by Litskai's heavy drinking. The straw that broke the camel's back was when Smirnov urgently needed Litskai during a Russian visit and he was unavailable because of alcohol-related incapacitation. Though First Deputy Yastrebchak has been named as Acting Minister, contacts told us that he will be a transitional figure. Serious efforts are underway to select a new minister, with three serious candidates: Sergei Chuban, Ruslan Slobodeniuk, and Yuri Ganen. Each one is backed by a different power center.

4. (C) Following is information about each of the three key candidates.

-- Sergei Chuban is Deputy Chairman of Obnovlenie

Party and enjoys the backing of Parliamentary Speaker Evgeniy Shevchuk. He is Chairman of the Foreign Policy Committee of the Supreme Soviet, an ethnic Moldovan in his mid-40's. Politically he is considered quite moderate, but observers are skeptical about his political strengths and his ability to function effectively as a chief negotiator. He is not afraid of speaking Romanian with representatives from the Moldovan side, and of the three candidates he is the one most likely to support some form of rapprochement with Moldova.

-- Ruslan Slobodeniuk was Yastrebchak's predecessor as Litskai's First Deputy Foreign Minister. He was known at that time to be a State Security (MGB) officer, reporting to Minister for State Security Vladimir Antiufeev. He is a hard-liner who is presumably backed by the security organs. At 5-plus-2 meetings, he used to talk on his cell phone directly to Antiufeev; reporting on Litskai's speeches and, at times, passing new instructions on to the Foreign Minister. From our best understanding of murky, behind-the-scenes events, Slobodeniuk so irked Litskai that he was removed from the MFA in a two-for-one trade, in which Litskai agreed to have two MGB-loyal deputies (Simonenko and Mollarchuk) in Slobodeniuk's place. Slobodeniuk now works at the Transnistrian Chamber of Commerce.

CHISINAU 00000746 002 OF 003

-- Yuri Ganen is Deputy Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, and was formerly Deputy Minister of Industry. He is a professional who has negotiating experience. In 2002-2003, the last time when 5 plus 2 working groups were functioning, Ganen was the Transnistrian chairman. It is presumed (but not confirmed) that he has the backing of Transnistrian Vice-President Alexander Koroliov.

The Powerful Men Behind the Candidates

15. (C) While ultimately the decision of naming the minister should be taken by Smirnov, contacts tell us that the other Transnistrian power centers are currently trying to influence the process. The following is information about each of the backers behind the candidates:

-- Parliamentary Speaker Yevgeniy Shevchuk is head of the Obnovlenie party, and widely understood to represent a more moderate, business-oriented alternative power center in Transnistrian politics. With the backing of the Sherriff fortune, Shevchuk seeks policies that will allow business interests to function, which would include resumption of transportation links. With Shevchuk's backing, Sergei Chuban's influence would come from the strength of the Obnovlenie majority in parliament, and he would represent a voice for greater moderation.

-- Minister for State Security Vladimir Antiufeev is one of the most influential powers in Transnistria. He is a key conduit for the Russian Security Services' interests in Transnistria and has significant influence over Smirnov. The GOM has long seen him as a key obstacle to the talks and views Antiufeev's departure as a key precondition for moving towards a settlement. As Minister for State

Security he controls his own "army," consisting of some of Transnistria's most battle-worthy military units, as well as an efficient intelligence service operating in both TN and right-bank Moldova. With Antiufeev's backing, Ruslan Slobodeniuk's influence would come from the power organs, and he would represent a hard-line voice against political compromise.

-- Vice President Alexander Koroliov is a career law-enforcement officer who leads a "domestic" hard-liner group which, unlike Antiufeev, is not necessarily subservient to the Kremlin. Koroliov is an advocate of a strong, paternalistic state ruled by a powerful and charismatic president, a vision lambasted by opposition media as a "roadmap towards totalitarianism." As former Minister of the Interior, the current minister was previously Koroliov's deputy, and the Vice President thus has an armed power base of Interior Ministry forces. The 2004 seizure by Koroliov's militiamen of Moldova Railway assets resulted in significant personal profits for Koroliov, and ensured his ongoing stance as a hardliner in the railway issue. He is vituperatively anti-Western and has criticized participants in USG Exchange Programs for lacking patriotism. While Koroliov's backing for Yuri Ganen is presumed but not confirmed, recent reports also suggest Koroliov's political star may be fading. A draft law currently under consideration in parliament would route presidential succession away from the vice president.

New Law on Presidential Succession Under Consideration

16. (C) A new draft of the law "On the Status of the President and Vice President of Transnistria" is currently under consideration by the Supreme Soviet. The old draft specified that the Vice President would take over in the event that the President left his position for whatever reason. However (according to a news article on the Russian-language Tiraspol news website (tiras.ru), succession in the new draft version would be as follows: if the President leaves

CHISINAU 00000746 003 OF 003

voluntarily or refuses to serve, then the Parliamentary Speaker (Shevchuk) would take over; if the president were to become incapacitated or be absent for other reasons, then control would pass to the Head of the Supreme Court (Vladimir Rimar). This draft law was approved by the relevant parliamentary committee, and reportedly has passed the first reading in Parliament.

17. (C) The law on Presidential Succession is clearly a move to weaken Koroliov. As this blow to his power is coming in the form of a Supreme Soviet decision, passage of this law would represent a triumph for Shevchuk. If Shevchuk is strong enough internally to pass this law, he may be strong enough to have his preferred candidate named Foreign Minister. Shevchuk may be cleverly using the Transnistrian legal system to lay the groundwork for assuring his own assumption of power, should Smirnov resign "voluntarily" (even if such resignation were tendered under pressure). The reported notion of control passing to Chairman of the Supreme Court should Smirnov leave under more mysterious circumstances

is odd. What is clear is that a process of jockeying for position is going on behind the scenes as the possibility of 5+2 talks becomes stronger.

PERINA